

WOMEN AND TRADE IN THE NIGERIA-BIAFRA WAR: FOCUS ON UMU-OWELLE CLAN, 1967-1970.

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17048187>

Keywords:

*Trade, Food,
Family, War,
Survival.*

Abstract: *The Nigeria-Biafra war, which commenced on July 6, 1967 and terminated on January 15, 1970 presented tremendous challenge to Umu-owelle women. The challenges ranged from targeted attacks, displacements, rape, starvation to abduction. The women were therefore faced with the challenges of reviving the economy so as to generate more resources to cushion the effects of the war. In response to these challenges, they took to the bush transacting trade under mahogany and Iroko tree to avoid aerial detection by the Nigeria aircraft and also in frontline trade popularly called Ahia Attack. Through their efforts, the economy was revived to ensure food security not only to their immediate family but to the Umu-owelle society at large. However, how the war affected Umu-owelle women and trade transaction during the war, and how they tried to solve and survive the challenging situation has not been documented. The study therefore sought to unravel the activities of Umu-owelle women as it pertains to wars and economic insolvency. To this end, the Marxist feminist theory and the Socialist Feminist theory were employed. The paper relies mainly on primary sources and also secondary sources of data. Available data will be analyzed using qualitative research methodology. The work covers the four communities which make up Umu-owelle clan namely, Nimo, Abagana, Abba and Eziowelle and the study starts from 1967 and terminates in 1970. The paper suggests for lessons to be drawn from Umu-owelle women's efforts in reviving the war-time economy, especially for the sake of good gender relations and, ultimately, gender equality.*

Introduction

Nigeria attainment of political Independence in 1960 was greeted with great optimism. However, the euphoria was soon dampened by series of

crisis which led to a civil war seven years later.¹

The burning issues that brought about the crisis that eventually led to the civil war are not farfetched. The first coup of 15th January, 1966

and the counter coup of 29th July of the same year are pointers to the fact that the civil war and the attendant holocaust were inevitable.² This was particularly so as neither the Federal Government on the Nigerian side headed by Colonel Yakubu Gowon nor the Biafra side led by Lieutenant Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu was prepared to concede.³ Thus, lawlessness and massacre of people especially the Igbo ethnic group ensued in many parts of the country; particularly in the Northern region. The mass killing of the Igbo in many northern and western cities, following the July 1966 counter coup consequently led to the surviving Igbo residents of these regions fleeing to the east for protection.⁴

The internally displaced persons' problem went beyond imaginable dimensions; and this culminated into bitterness, hatred for the Nigerian state and a resolve by the Easterners to establish a separate state called Biafra.⁵ The conflict ended with grave consequences for the people of Nigeria especially the Biafran side. Umu-Owelle clan which comprised of four communities namely Nimo, Abagana and Abba located in the western part of Njikoka Local Government Area and Eziowelle located in Idemilli North Local Government area all in Anambra State were not left out. Umu-owelle began to feel the impact upon the mass return of their people from North.

Umu-Owelle women were not left out of it as the women bore the brunt of the war of which they responded to. The war exacerbated Umu-Owelle women's insecurities, vulnerabilities and pauperisation and exposed them, especially as

refugees, frontline traders, farmers, sex workers, or beggars, to new forms of violence.⁶ They were faced with the daunting task of keeping families together after displacement, providing food, clothing and shelter.

The challenges of ensuring the food security for their families and households encouraged the women to take certain actions for their survival. Some women became displaced in internally displaced persons' camps while others tried to earn a living through trade, either eking out a marginal existence or even prospering.⁷ Umu-Owelle women were thus simultaneously victims of war, succumbing to their fate, and active agents of change, transforming their situation and society.

Theoretical Framework

It has become imperative to situate historical research on relevant social theories for a clearer understanding of the phenomenon and dynamics of the events. On this note, theoretical framework provides a particular perspective or lens, through which a topic is examined. This study is anchored on the Marxist feminist theory and the Socialist feminist theory.

For Marxists/socialists, gender transformation requires structural changes in the economic, political and cultural fundamentals, that is, in the substructure of a body politic. Marx felt that class remains an important analytical category in understanding changes in gender relations. When class oppression was overcome, gender oppression would vanish as well. Socialist feminism connects the oppression of women to Marxist ideas about exploitation, oppression and labour and assert that women are unable to be

free due to their financial dependence on males in the society. They argue that liberation can only be achieved by working to end both the economic and cultural sources of women's oppression.⁸

Thus, a schematic attempt to delineate some of the key issues is followed. There are two extreme positions on what war does to society in general, and to women in particular. A popular view, most typically represented by Nef John with regard to women, posits that war is inimical to human progress.⁹ Its antithesis, articulated by Hall,¹⁰ Giddens Anthony¹¹ and Bayart Francoise,¹² contends that war is not a negation of human progress, but instead, as a constituent factor, it catalyses social change, innovation and human progress. According to Hall,¹³ war was instrumental in the rise of the West and in strengthening the state; as Ehrlich argues, 'the longer lasting, more comprehensive and intensive the conflict, the more salient will be its effects upon the social structure'.¹⁴

Neither of these opposed perspectives is entirely correct or incorrect. As argued in this study, war can simultaneously cause destruction of society and bring about innovations and social transformation as well as lead to sexploitation and sex revolution. For Umu-Owelle women, war entailed increased gender violence, vulnerability and insecurity, while at the same time inculcated the development of new skills and confidence as they became involved in rebuilding the lives of their own families as well as their communities. Different women did different things to survive the war. Some became more vulnerable while others were empowered, especially as frontline traders. Such an

ambivalent legacy presents serious practical and theoretical challenges to feminists opposed to war and to those who view women as passive victims of war.

An Overview of Women and Trade Prior to 1967

Trading was an important aspect of the economy of Umu-Owelle women just like their counterparts in other parts of Igboland in the pre-colonial era. Trading went hand in hand with agriculture. Trade in Umu-Owelle was all about buying and selling various items or commodities by traders. There were two types of trading in Umu-Owelle namely, local and long distance trading and in these types of trading, process of exchange of commodities between sellers and buyers, was made possible by the introduction of media of exchange. First, barter trade was applied, but later transitional currencies came on board as legal tender shortly before, during and after the colonial rule in the area. A.E Afigbo rightly pointed out that "Although subsidiary to agriculture, trade was nonetheless an important aspect of Igbo economic activity."¹⁵ O.N Njoku has argued that trade was a crucial component of the economy, also that it is through trade that disparities in productive capacities between communities are bridged.¹⁶ The production of agricultural produce and industrial goods went beyond the subsistence needs of the producers. Although most households produced most of their basic needs in the pre-colonial era, the economy was nevertheless, very much market oriented. The existence of specialist producers of certain items arising from variations in natural

and human resource bases, dictated economic inter-independence.¹⁷

Apart from the local trade among Umu-Owelle women and their neighbours, they also engaged in external trade with their near and distant neighbours. The trade developed as a result of the people's quest to satisfy their individual and collective wants beyond the level of mere subsistence. This was made possible by the availability of such goods at various market centers across Igboland. Oral interview conducted shows that during the pre-colonial period, trading especially outside one's territorial limits, was not an easy task. This was because of certain dangers such as kidnapping, and enslavement. Although these factors tended to be a hindrance to normal trade, yet with the use of certain precautionary measures, these women managed to engage in long distance trade. Other distant traders from areas such as Aro, Awka, Otuocha, Agbaja visited the markets in Umu-Owelle. Commodities involved in the long distance trading included inter alia, slaves, salt, cloth, horses, sleeping and roofing mats, smoked fishes and palm produce.

In Umu-Owelle during the colonial period, the involvement of women in palm-oil production was all-pervasive. Without them it could have been impossible for any palm oil industry to thrive in the area. While they were indispensable in the processing of palm fruits to produce palm oil, Umu-Owelle women participated actively in the commercialization of palm oil. After production, the women's work continued as they were still the ones who carried the produce to a

nearby market where local middlemen as well as other local buyers bought from them.¹⁸

After Independence, some of the colonial agricultural policies were continued, and in some instances modified. For instance, the marketing boards were retained and continued to exploit the peasant farmers until the Obasanjo regime reformed them in 1976.¹⁹

The participation of Umu-Owelle women in the trade provided the needed dynamism for the growth of the trade in Umu-Owelle over time. In addition, it afforded the women opportunity to acquire wealth and ensure food security for their respective families, and make vital contributions to the socio-economic development of Umu-Owelle communities and the entire Igboland over the centuries.

Women and Trade Under the exigencies of War, 1967-1970

Trade

Trading was one of a number of survival strategies adopted by Umu-Owelle women and indeed women in Biafra to survive the 'siege economy' created by Nigeria's economic blockade. Two broad categories of trading took place during this antebellum year. First, the internal trade within Biafra and second, the trade with Nigeria-held Biafran territory or with Nigeria proper, that is a trade across the front lines often called *ahia attack* (attack trade).²⁰ However, this categorization of trade into two is neither rigid nor were they mutually exclusive. Things bought through *ahia attack* were sold in markets within Biafra and almost all the women involved in attack trade were involved in internal trade.

Internal trade

Though with some market re-orientation, like diversion of trade at Onitsha to Nnewi and Nnobi, Umu-Owelle maintained her pre-war trading arrangements. The diversion of trade was caused by Nigerian invasion of Onitsha early in 1968 which Umu-Owelle traders considered 'unsafe' for trade. Moreover, the city, following the invasion, now maintained only a fraction of its pre-war population. The rest had either gone back to their villages or remained in IDPs camps in federal troops unoccupied Biafra areas. Markets in such towns as Neni, Obeledu, Adazienu, Ichida and even Owerri were visited. Articles sold included yams, fermented cassava, garri, palm oil and palm wine. For instance, Adaeze Otiji from Okpukorji in Abba claims to have gone to Owerri in 1968 with Joy Obiefuna from Ifitenu village in Nimo, to buy garri.²¹

Within Umu-Owelle itself, the pre-war markets remained in use but the roofs of market buildings were heavily covered with palm fronds to avoid air raid, as the corrugated iron sheets used in roofing the market stalls always provided an aerial view which suggested human presence to Nigeria aircraft. Even when the market seemed unsafe because of air raid or possibilities of it, traders took to the bush referred to as bush market transacting business under tall- shading trees, like Uku (Mahogany) and Iroko which provided the needed shade in the morning and evenings of particular market days. For instance, Oye market in Nimo was shifted to Nkwo market in Etiti village, Afor Ngene in Orile Ngene Otenyi

and Eke udo market in Ifiteani village in Nimo; Eke market in Eziowelle was moved to Nkwo Omuke while Nkwo market in Abba was relocated to Oye Abba market, the places that provided the needed shade.²²

Foodstuffs formed the bulk of the commodities of trade. Women trading within Umu-owelle mostly sold proceeds from their farms and gardens in the bush markets. Petty trading was the basic character of local trade. While some people sold their personal property to survive, some of the refugees sold fractions of whatever they collected (like cord fish) from relief organization and used the proceeds to buy other needed commodities. There was acute shortage of transportation as a result of fuel shortage which was caused by the bombing of oil refinery at Port Harcourt and subsequent fall of Port Harcourt in May 1968.²³ Consequently, Umu-owelle women traders who were involved in trade with neighbouring towns had to convey their products by head portage. Hence, it was common to see women trekking in groups with their commodities balanced on their heads.²⁴

In their bid to survive the hard times, the women faced several dangers such as danger of being killed by bombs. In recounting her experience during the war, Nwanneka Ogugua from Ezinimo village in Eziowelle summarized the danger she faced thus:

I used to trek from my village in Nimo to Neni where I bought palm wine for sale. From Neni, I will proceed to Adazi-ani where I sold my goods. Trading at Adazi-ani ended for me the day I saw with my own eyes a fellow trader killed by shell.²⁵

However, as the prices of the available food stuffs went up, both the IDPs and undisplaced people suffered.

Ahia Attack

Ahia attack the second category of trading, was one of the ways women cushioned the effect of the 'siege economy' created by the Federal government. Put together, Ahia attack means transaction conducted under the threat of war or possible attack.²⁶ It is a term used to denote trade between Biafra and Nigerian-held Biafran territories and even Nigeria proper. The trade sometimes constituted the smuggling of highly essential goods from Nigeria into Biafra through the land corridor. It is fraught with enormous risk for the participants and trading in some commodities such as cigarettes and salt were seen generally as an illicit trade for the reason that it was scarce caused by economic blockade on Biafra, culprits of which were expected to face damning consequences.²⁷ The trade sometimes was conducted at night and under military protection because of the enormous risks involved in its transaction. It was essentially a survival response by the women to ensure food security for the home front in the absence of their husbands. It helped to relatively salvage not only Umu-Owelle but the entire Biafran war time economy that was becoming increasingly volatile by making available the scarce commodities.

The area round Abagana was to form an unofficial corridor for food infiltration for most of the later period of the rebellion.²⁸ The Nigerian troops occupation of the Enugu-Awka-Onitsha road forced Biafra to split into two broad administrative blocs namely, Biafra one and

Biafra Two. According to a respondent, Micheal Ezedinachi;

the present Imo, Abia down to Ihiala, Awka and the Umu-Owelle communities of Abagana, Nimo, Eziowelle, Abba and their environs were known as Biafra One, demarcated by the Federal troop occupation of Enugu-Awka-Onitsha road while agriculturally rich areas of Otuocha, Anam, Adani and Nsukka made up the Biafran Two. The situation was one in which Biafra One supplied imported goods and drugs, while Biafra Two supplied locally produced food.²⁹

The small corridor which linked 'Biafra Two' made it possible for the women traders from Umu-Owelle in 'Biafran one' to buy the dearly needed commodities especially food stuffs from the latter.

From oral testimony collected, Umu-Owelle women visited markets in Nsugbe, Nkwere Ofia, Umuleri, Aguleri and Nkwere- inyi. The route to Nkwere- Inyi ran from Nimo to Okpaeze through Adazi-ani, Agulu and Ogbu. Initially crossing of the Maamu river enroute to Nkwere Inyi was done using a double bamboo bridge but it was later replaced by the use of canoe. This transformation may have been prompted by the drowning of some of the traders who were crossing the river through the bamboo bridge. In travels to and from any of the markets mentioned above, traders left as early as 5 am. Usually, women travelled in groups and because the available vehicles had been deployed for military services, Ahia attack involved a long trek.³⁰ One of the informants remembers that sometimes they slept in the forest on their way to Nkwere Inyi and that if Biafran and Hausa (Nigerian)

soldiers were fighting on their way to the market, they slept in people's houses to avoid being killed by stray bullets.³¹ Writing on some of the risks involved, Felicia Okoye from Adakpe village in Abagana recalls that:

Ahia Attack traders set up observation posts at safe points in the bush near the highway from where they viewed long stretches of the tarred Federal highway. Once satisfied that patrol soldiers were not in sight, a signal was given to the traders waiting to cross, and each trader darted across the highway like an arrow, and ran for a reasonable distance in the bush track before resuming normal walking pace.³²

The volume and even the kind of commodities traded were determined by people's needs in Umu-Owelle. However, it would be futile trying to quantify the volume of goods traded. Needless to say, no record was kept of transactions. Some of the goods traded were ede-eko (cocoyam), ede- mmana (a species of cocoyam), garri, cassava tubers and Igbahiri, (a brand of rice). As demonstrated earlier, salt and cigarette were particularly declared illegal goods (ahia iwu) and traders caught trading in these two commodities were treated with viciousness because of their intense scarcity occasioned by economic blockade placed on Biafra by the Federal government.³³

Almost all Umu-Owelle women Attack traders had something to say on their experiences in the hands of the military as their goods were sometimes confiscated and they were compelled to cook for or produce garri for the Biafran soldiers. It is instructive to note that despite the fact that women dominated the ahia attack, there

were still male attack traders in Umu-Owelle, contrary to some of the received literature on ahia attack which treated it as a wartime feminine enterprise. But while male participation was constrained by their fear of conscription into the Biafran army or other paramilitary services, quite a number of them were still able to engage in ahia attack. Among such males were Patrick Okafor from Amabo village in Abba and Micheal Ezedinachi from Ifiteani village in Nimo. The latter was successful in the business. As for the former, he constructed walking sticks which he sold at Nkwere Inyi. The proceeds from it went into buying of salt and rolls of cigarette.³⁴

It was a highly flourishing trade which enriched many Umu-Owelle women. For instance, in Nimo, Bridget Akpu from Ifiteani village became prosperous. Also, Marcelina Anyansi from Orofia village and Esther Agana from Adakpe village both in Abagana who were refugees at Ideani thrived too.³⁵ However, this trade had its negative attributes. Many women had to compromise themselves with soldiers. Thus many who engaged in this trade were regarded as immoral. Others were forced to be used as spies sometimes by the Nigerian army. Thus many betrayed Biafra because they had to trade information in exchange for their safe passage.³⁶ According to Gloria Chuku, "it was a life or death trade but a child of necessity."³⁷ Therefore, despite the hazards, its prosperous nature made it attractive. These women accumulated wealth which helped them maintain their families. The wealth also helped them resettle their husbands and relations who returned after the war.

Most women who took part in the trade confessed that they made a lot of profit. For instance, Nneka Eze from Etiti village in Nimo disclosed that she made as much as 2,000 Biafran pounds on each trip she went³⁸ while Edith Nnadi from Umunama village in Eziowelle revealed that she made 2,500 Biafran pounds on each trip.³⁹ Some of them bought tangible items such as trinkets, wrappers with which they still remember the attack trade today. It must be stated that the attack trade made some women lose their morals. Some got richer than their husbands and lost the respect hitherto accorded their husbands. Some went as far as abandoning their husbands for Nigerian soldiers and such women were rejected by their husband's at the end of the war.⁴⁰ Ngozi Nzekwe from Amabo village in Abba who abandoned her husband and two children for a federal troop was humiliated and rejected by her husband's family. In Nimo, Anastasia Akpu from Ifiteani village who had two children from her relationship with the soldier was rejected by her husband. However, Ethel Oguejiofor from Akpu village in Abagana and Rose Otiaba from Egbengwu village were lucky to be accepted back by their husbands together with their children that resulted from the liason but that was after a cleansing ritual was performed.⁴¹ However, going by the confessions of some participants, the trade would appear very non-lucrative. One of them, Veronica Chidobelu from Ifiteani Nimo responded thus:

Which profit was there? There was no profit in the

Business. We just started it in order not to suffer

Kwashiorkor... There was no gain in the business.

It was Just suffering.⁴²

It appears that traders viewed the profit they made against dangers encountered. But if the risks are divorced from the profit, the margin would be enough to keep a business person stocked in the trade till the end of the war. However, Umu-Owelle women maintained that it was hunger that kept them in business. This kind of response is hardly particular to Umu-Owelle. Sydney Emezue also averred in his work, "women and the war", that the participants themselves do not believe that the trade was that lucrative.⁴³ There is no gain- saying that some of the goods bought from these black markets were essentially relief materials sent in by donor agencies from across the concerned world for even distribution to war-ravaged victims of the conflict. But the unscrupulous military and civilian staff took the relief materials away to sell to these women. Even road blocks into the hinterland only intercepted a handful of the sold items which in turn do not get anywhere near the intended end users.⁴⁴

Ahia Attack women traders, apart from buying salt from the attack market, also smuggled in items in dire demand such as tobacco, cigarette, bathing soap and matches.⁴⁵ the scarcity of these commodities made it possible for it to be sold at exorbitant prices. The currency in use in Umu-Owelle during the war was supposed to be the Biafra notes but the traders from the area who partook in the Ahia attack found things differently. It may be recalled that the Federal Government, as part of its cold, calculated

strategy of economically blockading Biafra which it considered essential to effective defeat of Biafra, on January 3, 1968 replaced the old Nigerian pound declaring the ones within Biafra illegal tender and freezing all deposits held in banks in the Biafran territories.⁴⁶ This had biting consequences for people of Umu-Owelle as they found overnight that old Nigerian notes within their possession had become worthless.

Emeka Ojukwu, following this unilateral currency switch by Nigeria, launched Biafra currency notes during a joint meeting of the consultative Assembly on the 24th of January 1968. Two days later, the notes, in denominations of one pound and five shillings, went into general circulation all over the Republic of Biafra.⁴⁷ Unfortunately, this effort at providing a legal tender for Biafra was sabotaged by continued reduction of territories under Biafra influence, since immediately Nigeria took over a town, they demonetized Biafra currency in use in such towns. In Umu-Owelle, women, especially “attack traders” found the Biafra notes inadequate for transaction of business with Nigeria-occupied areas of Biafra. However, since Gowon did not include Nigeria coins in the currency switch and it remained tradable throughout the war period, it came in handy for business. So the women traders exchanged their Biafran currencies with Nigerian currency before they bought their commodities.⁴⁸ For Umu-Owelle women who participated in the trade, it was a risky venture as they were sometimes harassed or robbed on the way by Biafran soldiers.⁴⁹ Adeze Otiji observed that: the trade was not only dangerous but sometimes

frustrating in the sense that most of the time, we were robbed by the soldiers before we could get to our destination. So we devised several strategies of hiding our money from the soldiers.⁵⁰

The women adopted some strategies such as hiding coins under caps, in underwear, in yam tubers after which it was concealed with clay. Women traders caught with such coins were severely punished. Such women were often sent to cook for soldiers fighting at the war front. But the necessity of the coins made traders to adopt several means to transport coins without being caught. Umu-Owelle women who partook in ahia attack still remember some of the ‘clandestine’ means of carrying coins:

We drilled holes in tubers of yam and stuffed coins into them. The holes were covered with clay making them to look as though nothing had been done on the tubers of yam. We pretended they were yam we bought to eat. When we got to the market, we broke them and brought out the money which we used in transacting business.⁵¹

If we consider that Umu-Owelle and indeed other parts of Biafra suffered food shortage during the war, one may begin to doubt whether this practice was common among traders. Even if it was, there are possibilities that it was dropped as starvation became more biting. Alternatively, for some of the attack traders, they buried Nigerian coins in pounded cassava (fufu) which was in turn placed inside a plate.⁵² whichever way Nigerian coins were carried, they served together with the Biafran notes, as the medium of exchange.

Salt scarcity was one of the features of Umu-Owelle war economy. The Federal government seizure (occupation) of the salt producing areas of Biafra coupled with the blockade of Biafran source of international goods which could have created a relief through importation, all contributed in unleashing salt famine. The importance of this commodity as preservative and an accompaniment which improved the flavor of food made it indispensable in Umu-Owelle even in war situation and indeed, in the entire Biafran enclave. To contain the salt scarcity, though not effectively, many attack traders from Umu-Owelle took to trading in salt. Heavy as the commodity could be, they carried it on their heads all the way from markets in Nkwere Inyi, Nkwere ofia, Ogbaru, Atani, Nsugbe and Aguleri. Many women like Pauline Igwe who did not have enough money to start ahia attack operated as porters assisting others to carry their salt on a price. Within Umu-Owelle, a number of women became salt-vendors buying in bulk from attack traders and selling in smaller quantities usually in spoons to the people. Many refugees also sold quantities of salt they received from relief agencies.⁵³

Wittingly most of the cord fishes sent to Umu-Owelle, and indeed Biafra in general, by relief agencies during the war was coated in salt to serve a dual purpose; as a source of salt and the direly needed protein. In fact, salt was put a priority with strategic war materials to be brought in from outside through the Biafran Organization of Freedom Fighters (BOFF) crossing behind the Nigerian lines to buy salt and encouragement of Biafrans resident abroad to

send salt as part of the food parcels they donated to the overseas relief agencies.⁹⁶⁵⁴ But regrettably this could not effectively contain the salt famine. The main management rested on the women in their various kitchens. To them to add a pinch of salt to soup while on fire meant wasting salt in soup. To start with, it was not everybody that could buy salt. Some would lick salt before eating their saltless food as a way of managing the little quantities they could buy. Many adapted to the salt scarcity by adding salt to food after cooking. They maintained that they didn't add enough salt then since they just added a little quantity to make the food palatable.⁵⁵

Another type of Ahia attack involved smuggle trade between Biafra and Nigeria in the Onitsha-Benin axis. All the dangers inherent in the intra-Biafran trade also existed in the Biafra-Nigeria trade. For the traders moving from Biafra into Nigeria, the information on Biafra troops' location and movement became a condition for safe passage into Nigeria.⁵⁶ For the trade between Onitsha-Benin axis, there were two major routes; Route 1 from Atani, the traders paddled across the River Niger in small canoes to Abala Oshimili from where they trekked to Abatauno market in the Midwest, and Route II; The traders paddled down by canoe to Akili Ozizor- from there they crossed over to Oko Ogbele to utchi all in the Igbo west of the Niger. The journey to these areas west of the Niger took about three days. Nigeria coins were the means of exchange.⁵⁷

The traders bought items such as salt, soap, cigarette, tobacco, and other essential commodities. Valuable items such as jewelry

were sold to Nigerians. Some of these commodities were sold at Atani market and Umu-Owelle women and other women from all parts of Biafra- Nnewi, Ozubulu, Orlu, Nkwere etc went to Atani market to buy these items. Besides, some Umu-Owelle women traders still travelled in convoy or in a fleet of canoes with other Igbo women from other communities such as Ogbaru, Nsugbe, Nnewi, Adazi and Otuocho, from Atani to Igbo areas west of the River Niger. The trade was an all-female affair made up of mostly married women.⁵⁸

Adolescent girls participated and served as porters and also helped to scoop out water from the canoes as they ferried to and fro the areas west of the Niger. For instance, Gladys Anike from Etiti village in Nimo, Nkemdilim Anuntu from Uruokpala village in Abagana among others participated in Attack trade as teenagers. Nneka Oguaju observed that most times, they returned from the attack trade with swollen legs and stiffened necks as a result of the long distance they trekked and the heavy loads they carried. They had to disguise as old women to avoid the risk of being raped by soldiers who were given gifts of drinks and cigarette.⁵⁹ thus the enterprising and ingenious ways the Umu-owelle women and Igbo women in general responded to the war economy were commendable. It also confirmed what C.K. Meek had earlier observed about them. "The most striking feature of Igbo life is the keenness displayed by the women in petty trade"⁶⁰

Conclusion

The dynamics in food security as shown by Umu-Owelle women clearly shows the noble and

indispensable roles of the women in the growth of the Umu-Owelle economy and the Igbo economy in general. In virtually every aspect of the processing and distribution sector, Umu-Owelle women played some dynamic roles in nurturing and developing the resources and economic potentials of Umu-Owelle to enviable heights. The distribution process of the economy witnessed steady and remarkable growth under the pivotal strength of the women folk. They displayed enormous organizational expertise which ensured food security for their households by devising strategies of survival via engagement in trade.

Notwithstanding the tragic consequences of the war, it is instructive to note that the war revealed the innate abilities of women in challenging situations. It offered an opportunity for women to prove their ability and proficiency to adapt to difficult conditions. Put differently, men's and women's efforts cannot always be neatly divided into binaries and dualities. In fact, it was the war which exposed the proficiency and ingenuity in the women. It made people to realize that women were capable of changing the society and such changes can be seen as reflected in the empowerment of women. They took place, however, under the exigencies of war, all of which strongly impacted on women's lives as well as on the whole communities. The women were challenged by the circumstances of the war-time and they responded to them by engaging in trade to ensure food security for their families even in the face of the aftermath of devastation, deprivation and poverty that pre-dominated the period.

In conclusion, this premise is hinged on the fact that there shall be no meaningful development of any society where development indices are gender stereo-typed. This is because for genuine overall development to be attained, there is need for both men and women to complement each other as each has specific role to play.

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